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RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1416  
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 0857  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001247

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STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR  
S/CRS  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
INR/IAA  
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2017

TAGS: PREF PREL KCOR KCRM SNAR

SUBJECT: POSITIVE PUBLIC REACTION TO DRUG STRIKE

PORT AU PR 00001247 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Public reaction to joint operations conducted by the GoH and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) on July 16 to arrest and remove drug traffickers to the U.S. has been largely positive. Coming after a months-long rhetorical campaign against drug-trafficking and corruption led by President Preval, most Haitians appear to view the operations as bold, decisive action to back up the talk. (Note: The HNP delivered to U.S. custody suspected traffickers Rosele St. Pierre, Bernard Piquion, and Lavoud Francois. St. Pierre and Piquion were already in custody; the HNP detained Francois on July 16. Guy Phillippe escaped arrest and remains at large. End Note.) Though media commentary reflects a general assumption among Haitians that the USG initiated the operations, with some involvement by Haiti's Bureau Against Narcotics (BLTS) police unit, and some media have referred to the rendering of the prisoners as "extradition" (not permitted under the Haitian constitution), there is little indication yet of a nationalist backlash resulting from the arrests.

¶2. (SBU) Among more prominent commentators, reaction focused on the legality of joint operations. Senator Youri Latortue admitted that the action "seemed legal under the agreement between the government and the DEA." That said, he bemoaned the government's inability to act alone and seized the opportunity to make a pitch for reinstituting the army. Senator Rudy Herivaux echoed that view, though he later told Polcouns he had some reservations about how authorities selected the targets. He responded positively to Polcouns assurances that the GoH had initiated the operations and identified the suspects, and that authorities would soon detail the charges against them. Former army officer and presidential candidate Himmller Rebu, a frequent political commentator, affirmed that the agreements between Haiti and DEA are "irregular but legal," while lamenting the GOH's inability to apprehend its drug criminals without foreign assistance. Senate President Joseph Lambert on July 19 privately expressed his support for the actions in a meeting with the Ambassador, although he suggested that a magistrate's presence on such raids would help mitigate

charges of ill-treatment by individuals involved in anti-drug raids.

¶3. (C) Comment: Ironically, we are not sure to what agreement Senators Latortue and Herivaux are referring (In private discussions numerous other Haitians have also brought up "the DEA agreement.") The 1997 Maritime Agreement permits hot pursuit in Haitian territorial waters and allows for U.S. shipriders. INL Letters of Agreement have covered DEA training for the BLTS, but would not address operational issues, much less rendering of prisoners. If Haitians believe that these operations are explicitly authorized in a bilateral agreement, we need do nothing to disabuse them of that notion.

¶4. (C) Comment Continued: Even with Guy Phillippe still at large, the operations appear to be a major political coup for President Preval. His public campaign against crime and corruption struck a chord among the Haitian populace and he has translated his rhetoric into robust action. We can take great satisfaction with our own patient diplomacy and engagement with Preval on narcotics trafficking. His position has evolved from public finger-pointing at the U.S. and summary dismissal of the value of bilateral actions to intense and unfettered cooperation. End Comment.

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